

February 14, 2017

Dear Senator Catherine Osten, Senator Paul Formica, and Representative Toni Walker:

My name is Stephanie Mansell and I am from Storrs, CT. I have two sons who attend Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School in Glastonbury, which is part of the CREC magnet school system. I am writing to ask you to please support the continued funding for our magnet schools.

My children's lives are enriched and education positively impacted through the extraordinary opportunities they experience every day at GEHMS. There is not a day that goes by that I am not tearful and full of gratitude as I drop off or pick up my children or stay to volunteer for their many events. The diversity they are immersed in is something that would not have been replicated in their home town school system. When my oldest son began at GEHMS, I remember his Pre-Kindergarten teacher stating that one of the greatest advantages my children will have by attending GEHMS was that they would be color blind. She was right. My children have never once mentioned color, or anyone looking different from them, despite being in an incredibly diverse environment. Magnet schools mimic the world population and because of that the children do not notice race or other socioeconomic differences, they are just friends and classmates who work together as a team. Our world needs more of this, so much more.

The two year Pre-Kindergarten program is absolutely crucial. My sons began this program at 2 and 3 years old. As a result, the social, emotional and cognitive skills they learned launched them ahead and they are well beyond prepared for not only Kindergarten, but for life. When my second year Pre Kindergarten began reading past the level that was required for the end of the year, his teacher went above and beyond to search for materials that would challenge his reading skills, and he entered Kindergarten fully prepared to take off running and be a leader and mentor to students just entering GEHMS.

The theme based learning at GEHMS, a NASA explorer STEM school, is unparalleled. My four year old is sounding out words, writes all of his letters and is learning math and science skills that will surely change his life. My six year old writes sentences, and is learning incredibly advanced math and science skills including participating in a recent Take Apart Lab, an innovative way to encourage kids to explore how things work. Both of our sons are learning Chinese, which began at the Pre-K 3 level and can count, sing songs, say colors, and greetings in Chinese. The planetarium is an incredible resource as well as their science lab, both vital to seamlessly immersing STEM into all curriculum. The academics paired with the diversity and social/emotional development and support is simply incomparable.

GEHMS holds its students and staff to very high standards and they all rise to the occasion. Through constant creative and innovative engagement, the students are confident and want to be good students and good people. GEHMS is an environment where students are lifted to feel empowered and they truly believe they can change the world, and they will. The morale of the staff is nothing I've ever seen, they treat their job very seriously and it is evident they truly want to be there.

I am urging the legislature to follow through on its promise to invest in the future of CT Magnet Schools. Magnet schools have a successful track record of closing the achievement gap and providing all students a chance not only to succeed but also to thrive. I ask you to continue funding the schools that are already successfully operating and have demonstrated success before you consider funding new school choice options.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my letter. Please reply and share with me how you will ensure that my children's school's funding will remain in place. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Mansell

Proud Mother of PreK4 and Kindergarten students at Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School